

Testimony of Janet Peck
Judiciary Committee, March 19, 2009

Please Support: HB 6452: An Act Concerning Discrimination

My name is Janet Peck and I am here in support of HB6452.

I have been a Licensed Professional Counselor in private practice for over 20 years counseling people on a wide variety of issues and in all walks of life including transgendered individuals.

I have heard many stories from transgendered clients –how they have been fired from jobs or have had difficulty being hired in the first place especially during or after their transition. I have heard how they have not been hired because their prior work experience was not in the gender that they are now presenting in and how some have delayed their transition for years because they feared the loss of their job or their home.

These are very real issues that often make it more difficult for transgendered individuals to become fully productive citizens - not because they don't have qualifications for jobs but because employers discriminate against them based on their gender identity and expression rather than on their ability, education, experience or skill set.

I have also counseled transgendered clients whose worries about losing their jobs or housing or ability to obtain loans have triggered understandable symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Although I do not identify as transgendered, my gender expression often falls outside of society's expectation of what female is supposed to look like. In other words, although my internal experience is congruent with my female body, to some people, my gender expression is seen as more male than female or more masculine than feminine. I know this because out in the world, I am addressed as sir as often as I am addressed as ma'am.

Because my gender expression seems to fall outside of society's expectation of what a woman is supposed to look like, before opening my private practice, I always worried when applying for a job that I would be judged by my non-gender conforming appearance rather than by my ability to do the job. I often would not apply for jobs where I thought this appearance might work against me even though the job itself might have been something I would have wanted.

This felt very limiting to me and although my decision to go into private practice was made for many reasons, without question, one reason was that I would not have to worry about being fired for how I looked. And although I am happy with the choice I made, I often wonder if I would have been doing something different if I did not have to make a career choice somewhat based on my gender expression. If this law had been in the statutes then, I might have made a different choice.

Not only would this bill protect those who identify as transgendered, it would protect all individuals, including me, whose gender expression does not conform to society's expectation of gender.

One of my roles as a counselor is to support all clients to follow their own voice and to live the truth of who they experience themselves to be. All people have a right to live their lives in the way that is true to who they are without the fear of being harassed, fired from jobs or the fear of losing their home or being denied credit so that they may reach their highest potential and so that they can be fully participating members of society.

As a woman and as a lesbian, I know first hand what it is like to live without important legal protections. Because I am fortunate to live in Connecticut, I also know the peace of mind and sense of security that comes from living in a state that has enacted laws to protect me. It is time that Connecticut does the same for its transgendered citizens.

This bill will clarify to employers, schools, landlords and credit agencies that they can not discriminate against individuals based on gender identity or expression and will clarify the State of Connecticut's commitment to treat all of its citizens equally under the law.